



WRITERS

2015

WRITERS

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Letter from the Editor

Readers,

The 2015 edition of *Writers* is a reminder that texts and images function as memories. Some of these memories were lived; some were constructed. Either way, they present ideas chosen and captured in the physical space of paragraphs, stanzas, and frames. When we read or look at them, we participate in a kind of remembering of these ideas—an experience beautiful enough to remind us of the incontrovertible value of art. The author of our epigram, Dave Eggers, also once said, “Books have a unique way of stopping time in a particular moment and saying: Let’s not forget this.” Certainly, with each of their pieces, our contributors are reminding themselves and their readers to “not forget” the significance of a powerful moment in time.

In our Editor’s Choice poem, we are provided with a memory of walking along the Oregon Coast: “We stopped at a tiny stream/and turned back to the south, and it meant something.” That “something,” is enigmatic to the reader here, amorphous—like the nature of many of the important ideas associated with our memories. But they are important nonetheless. And we see that this year in *Writers*: in a child’s experience receiving surgery on her ears (“Give Ev’ry Man Thy Ear”), in a reminder that our bodies contain imprints of our lives (“Vite”)—even in the intimate conversations that occur in a minivan (“It Always Happens in a Car”). Our photographs are also physical representations of memories: moments made significant by a photographer’s intention, mixtures of untainted reality and artistic modification. Whether they take the form of family pictures (“Summer Portrait”) or delicate images of nature (“Illusions”), they are all pieces that highlight personal, communal, and natural histories in surprisingly creative contexts.

Another thoughtful writer, the 20th century Trappist monk Thomas Merton, once said, “Every moment and every event of every man’s life plants something in his soul.” We can access these moments and events, indeed “remember” them, in both painful and lovely ways as we read each page of *Writers*.

Sincerely,
Athena Lathos
SENIOR EDITOR

"We are unusual and tragic and alive."

– Dave Eggers

(A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius)



Broken Sonnet for K

BY PHILIP ELLEFSON

we had decided the ocean was a good,
solid symbol of death or the unknown

but when it rushed to lap at our bare heels,
we squealed and leapt like children deep in play.

we walked north toward Haystack Rock, watched it
dissolve into fog, into dark, and it

meant something. we stopped at a tiny stream
and turned back to the south, and it meant something.

i pointed out a star i thought was Venus,
and somehow you absorbed my mythic meaning

so we stumbled over stony words until
we arrived at the vital, glowing truth –

where we touched hands and we touched lips and nothing
was a symbol anymore.



Baptism

BY AMANDA ADAMS





It Always Happens in a Car

BY COITO

8:15 P.M. 0 MPH.

The street is a fishbowl. At least that's what it looks like through the scattered beads of rain on my side of the car. The gas station on the left leans toward me, nudging itself into my vision along with the red of the streetlights. Those shining circles of light remind me of a costume I wore for a dance recital once. Threads and threads of pompous scarlet sequins tightening around my stomach. I hated that thing.

We're on our way back from confession. My mom wanted us to get a good soul scrub in before we go to Christmas Eve Mass next week to watch an eight-year-old play the Virgin Mary in the pageant. So I dragged my feet into the stuffy beige room with the scratchy brown screen and anonymously uttered, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." Fr. Francis gave me three "Hail Mary's" and a "Glory Be" for my penance. I was supposed to kneel in front of the stained-glass saints and recite them right away. Instead, I walked outside without even breaking the surface of the "holy" water with my fingertips. I abandoned that piece of Catholic choreography long ago.

So now everybody can go straight to Heaven if my dad runs the red light right at this moment and kills us all. I kind of wish he would because everybody is asking me rude questions. I try to ignore them by focusing my eyes in and out on the red. Circles to blobs. Blobs to circles. Then,

"Why are you so different?"

3:32 P.M. 40 MPH.

If the smog doesn't choke you first, the pollen from the orchards will follow closely behind. Not to mention the fact that you'll have to shrink yourself to make room for everyone else. We don't expand our borders here, we only accommodate others. So when a person leaves, everyone's lungs hold more, and we slowly remember how sweet the taste of air is.

This is especially true for the person who leaves.

Modesto, CA is home to drive-thru cigarette stores and dead, yellowed grass that lines the freeways. It's one of those places that has a scary amount of people who boast about being high school sweethearts—the ones who settled down; you know the type. Anyway, the most disturbing part of the whole ordeal is that they don't know just how unsettling their situation is. Not romantic at all, in my admittedly pretentious point of view. I felt this way about the civilized act of “settling” when I was growing up, too. I know because I learned at a young age how beautiful it is to create space. To be within and without. To leave.

The year I entered the third grade, my parents purchased their first minivan, officially entering the realm of mortgage-paying, heteronormative-mind-breeding suburbia. That turquoise van was just absurd enough to suggest nonconvention while comfortably staying within the boundaries of middle class expectation. It didn't take too long for my little, cinnamon-lipped brother and me, clad in overalls, to discover that the backseat, made to fit three people, could recline so far that you could almost lay flat on your back. And, to top it off, there was a window in the roof. A revelation.

One day, I suggested that we lay down in the back for the duration of our trip home from school. So, upon spotting that beacon of turquoise, we ran up, pulled open the sliding door with our peanut butter and jelly fingers, and snuggled into the new car aroma of the seats. My mom probably protested when she realized we were reclining the seat all the way back. But she was already driving and in a hurry and we weren't listening anyway. We were flying.

My eyes were fixed on the brilliant blue blur with notes of white soaring above the window of the roof. I looked over at Albert Joseph—his kindergarten hands were held tense at his side, his brown eyes spilling with joy I could only ever describe as my brother's. Even though my experience of the sky was folded neatly into a rectangle of glass manufactured by Chevrolet, I tasted each molecule of oxygen as if the whole of it were in every cavity of my lungs. For once in my short existence, my view on the drive home was not assaulted by dilapidated farmhouses crumbling in the midst of budding corn stalks and almond trees. Brilliant blues. Notes of white.

We got rid of the turquoise minivan five years later, when my parents could afford the newest form of transportation essential to the suburban home in 2008: a car with a DVD player. These back seats don't even recline. They make you look ahead at a window of a different kind. Albert Joseph stares blankly at it in open-mouthed oblivion, headphones on. I try to remind my lungs how sweet the sky tastes as I look out my window at the downtown drive-thru cigarette store.

11:00 P.M. 0 MPH.

There is no Azealia Banks or Moon Tides playing tonight. There is only the fog, squatting on the rooftops, steeping in this moment of time while we sit in the car. Streetlights line the sidewalks, giving the black asphalt of the road an artificial glow and making the fog shimmer around the edges. They buzz. Rebecca says that it sounds like a mini-golf course. I don't know exactly what she means, but that's what makes me like her observation so much.

Pieces of moonlight give us mosaic vision in the darkness of the car: a receipt from the grocery store in that lunar slice, Rebecca's ring of keys in another. We have reclined the driver and passenger seats so that we can lay on our sides and talk shit about people, like the girl in our history class who pronounces the accented "I" in Salvador Dalí—as if the word ending on an elevated sound indicates the elevation of her character. We know our kind of asshole is far better than hers. Laughter swells in the space between us and settles slowly like the fog outside. I squint into the dark in an attempt to focus on the entirety of Rebecca's face and find her contented smile, untouched by the choosy shards of moonlight, and cannot help but grin to myself. To the world, Rebecca presents a brooding, "punk is not dead" aesthetic. When I see her contented smile—only lips, no teeth, eyes closed—I am reminded that I know something the world doesn't know.

I remember being younger than I am in this moment. In a different darkness, in my childhood bed, I read American Girl's *The Care and Keeping of Friends* by flashlight, wondering who I am supposed to take all these quizzes with. I brought the book to school with me this semester. There are crooked green and blue circles around answers on one quiz—the green for me, the blue for my imagined pal who I was supposed to care for and keep.

But now I'm here and it's 12:47 A.M. The world and its ambiguities are mingling outside of the car. I'm twisting my hand in a touch of twilight, responding to Rebecca as she talks about being a second semester senior, how she can't relate to her roommate who is drinking green tea with laxatives every day, and why she thinks she needs a tattoo sleeve. I am trying to rest in this minute the way the fog is resting on the rooftops, so I mull over all the words floating around the emptiness between us, commit to memory the smell of Aquage hair product mixed with laundry detergent. And I really listen to the mini-golf buzz of the streetlights. Maybe one day I'll know what she meant by that.

8:20 P.M. 55 MPH.

"Why are you so different?"

"I'm queer." They ask so I tell them.

What follows is the kind of silence that takes residence in every organ. I can feel its heaviness, its concreteness, resting in my stomach. My skin swallows every empty second and lies it down in the marrow of my bones. The rain continues to throw itself onto the car. I try to match its rhythm with that of my heartbeat. A boom and a clap. I think someone else, besides me, is crying. But it's hard to tell because I'm really just listening for the booms and the claps, for time passing. For the assurance that I won't be perpetually sitting in this moment—

Rain's scent is sticky. It crawls into the soles of shoes and the scalp of hair so that everything it touches has some memory of those droplets of water long after they cease their free fall from the clouds.

My gray sweatshirt has the rain from that evening in the zipper. I bet it's in the leather of my brother's belt, too. The collar of my dad's shirt. The seam of my mom's blouse. The interior of the minivan we bought in 2008.

Tree Woman

BY AMANDA MUNRO



Bloom

BY HALI THOMPSON

She stood there in the doorway when I told her I was leaving. I was out on the porch. She told me that she hoped I would be disappointed. I remember because she said it all wide-mouthed, gap-toothed, ringing in my ears, furrow in her brow and wrinkles in her forehead. Tired lines around her eyes as if she had been there before. "I hope you will be disappointed" swirling in the bright summer sky, catching the words in the light breeze, and settling itself angrily in the too-pink flowers wrapped around the columns on the porch, holding up the structure.

I wasn't quite sure what to say. I'm not sure I said anything at all. Never had I suspected that she would hope I'd find myself disappointed with a life that she brought me into, that she was there from the moment I first took a breath. I would never have predicted it when I paged through books full of photos, her holding my hand or me in her arms. Her behind a lens, while I took my first steps and built sandcastles and ate cake and went to high school.

Her "I hope you will be disappointed" riddled me as I left with the man that I love, while she stood in the doorway and watched his beat-up car carry me out of the driveway and across state lines. And it haunted me when I would fall asleep on my side of our bed, him on his. Would make me question his love while bacon sizzled in a pan and he asked me how I wanted my eggs that morning, as I watched the light from the diamond in my ring sparkle across the tablecloth. Stalked me outside work after receiving a promotion, while I enthused about it with my friends over drinks. Lingered while I was dancing in white and he was dancing in a suit, my head on his shoulder when he told me, "We made it."

Standing here in the doorway with a positive plus on the white stick, my heart flutters with excitement for what may be blooming within me. But "I hope you will be disappointed" brings on the dizzying, impending doom, the pounding in my chest and the rush in my veins. The fear of what is blooming to become barren or to not be there at all. My eyes train themselves on the

floral wallpaper before me while I scramble for my keys, the metal cold on my skin. The fan whooshing with all its might as I make my way out the door and into July's triple digits.

I drive down to Rite Aid, the car air conditioner creating a vacuum that seals me away from the heat outside. The heat painting itself over me as I pile out of the car. Air conditioner meeting me again in all its cool aggression when I walk through the sliding doors. The fluorescent light too bright for some reason. I rub my temples while I adjust to them. There's a woman with a basket heading towards the hair care aisle. She's on the phone—"No, mom. It's on the table by the door." I scan the row of aisles and feel a wave of nausea escalate, but fight it down with some easy breaths.

"Is there anything you need help finding?" It's a short man with a thick mustache. His name tag says "Jeff."

I quietly shake my head. He tells me that if I need anything to feel free to find him. He punctuates this with his name—in case I wasn't aware of his nametag—before following after the woman in the hair care aisle, now deciding between boxes of dye, on the phone with her mom.

I head down the feminine care aisle, scanning all the brands, the different promises each one proclaims on its packaging. I select a few of them, trying to vary my results. I try to envision a pretty positive plus on all of these glorious sticks, like a good grade on a homework assignment in elementary school.

I pay up front. The woman at the register clearly debating whether to appear solemn or excited while she scans them. Probably having scanned them before in front of sad, young eyes with anxious stomachs hoping their cycles are just off. But also having bagged them and passed them over to baby-fever eyes, filled to the brim with newborn hope after just missing a period. I'm not sure what my eyes look like to the woman, whose nametag boasts "Carol." She catches my eyes, trying to interpret them and wanting to ask but not sure. I feel her glance at my hands, landing on my wedding band, and then, "My daughter has been trying for months."

I sort of smile at Carol, feeling slightly uncomfortable at this disclosure. "It's hard. Especially if you get to a certain age." I'm not at that age, though—the one that women's magazines lament. I just wasn't sure what to add to the conversation.

Carol's eyes brighten. "She waited too long. Wanted to move up in her career." She rolls her eyes in a particular way that reflects a sentiment that some possess about women who put careers before babies. I'm too nauseous to give my own contrary assertions. "She's going to try some hormones. But, you know what I told her—I told her that her time's up." She raises her eyebrows in this sort of "I told you so" way and laughs as if she and I are sharing an inside joke. She laughs loudly in a way that's almost visible it's so vibrant.

I nod in a noncommittal way as she piles my items in the bag, passing the plastic across the counter. I tell Carol, "Good luck to your daughter," before I leave and head out into the parking lot. I sit in my idle car for several minutes, trying to gain the courage to drive home, to bless my holy sticks with my hopeful urine and wait for the results.

When I come home, Oliver is busy assembling a table. "Just got home from work a little bit ago," he says. He explains to me that he ordered the piece of furniture a week ago. It arrived at his work because he wanted it to be a sort-of-surprise. He says he remembered that I had been upset about how roughed up ours got from when the movers brought it in. "And I just want everything to be perfect here for you." As if he would never want me to be disappointed.

I tell him how nice it is. It is a nice table. It's the gesture that's the sweetest part and I try to make sure he knows how sweet it is. And he looks beautiful, his head to the side trying to match the directions with the parts of the table. He has a wooden leg in hand, holding it up, while he stares at the sheet intently, his tongue stuck out a bit in concentration. He tells me that he's going to spend some time on this, those eyes of his trying to convince me that he's got it, while he looks through an assortment of screws.

"I was thinking of ordering some takeout," I tell him, not sure I'm quite in the mood to eat anyway, butterflies lining the walls of my stomach. I

leave him with the table after he nods a bit to the takeout, mostly focused on the wooden parts, trying to make them whole.

Then, I'm in the bathroom.

And then, I've used all of the sticks, wondering how I was able to produce enough pee.

And then, I'm waiting.

I pick up my sticks and view them all as if I'm inspecting works of art. Looking at the patterns and making my criticisms, feeling this flutter in my chest that I've only felt a few times before in my life. I keep thinking about Oliver in his car the day I left with him. "I'll always be there, you know that, right?" he asked as he saw my hands trembling, as midday grew to sunset grew to darkness. We had planned to take a road trip across the country, settle down in California, start our lives together. "But, I can take you back and wait for you in California. Until you're ready." He just wanted to be sure it was what I really wanted, that I was ready to start my own life away from my overbearing mother and all that I've ever really known. That I was ready to start a life that I would share with him. He had stopped the car on the side of the road. And I explained to him that I was trembling because my bones have never been so excited and so scared at the same time—excited for the beautiful possibilities and scared for all that to shatter. I wanted this more than anything, I assured him, as he assured me the same before pulling back onto the road. I was ready to taste my own freedom, to understand what the world feels like when you're thousands of feet above or below it, watching the landscapes change as you're passing them by, blending one into another. And I did see it all. And I fell more and more in love with the world and with him as we did it all together. We really did make it.

As I leave the bathroom now, and wander into the living room, I realize how much we have grown while I watch him working on the table, halfway done. But he's still the Oliver I've always known, his eyes scrambling around my face for clues as I approach him. Always trying to kiss my worries away. Looking at me as if I was the most brilliant thing he'd ever seen since we first met. Treating me like the brightest star and loving me in all my phases and I

him, in all his eclipses, even when he dwindles behind his shadows. All I can ever see is his light.

And his eyes have all the warmth in the world as I stand there with one of my sticks. They were all painted with the same pattern, same strokes. He looks at me with this knowing that undoes all the knots in my stomach. I don't even need to explain when he asks, "Really?" over and over- "Really?" dancing around in the lightest of ways, like we did at our wedding party. "We made it" still whispering in my ear.

And later, we sit across from each other at the table he finished piecing together, eating some takeout. "I don't want you to get too excited," I tell him suddenly. "I don't want you to get disappointed."

"There won't be anything to be disappointed in," he assures me between bites of spaghetti, marinara dripping from his fork to his plate. He smiles at me the way he always has and asks me what we need to do.

As summer changes to fall and fall to winter, I feel the first kicks. I ring up a number I have sparsely felt my fingers reach for. Racking up anxiety while I listen to the dial tone. We say our hellos before I get to the point: "I'm having a baby, Mom." She draws out a sigh. "Well, that's something," she says before she tells me she needs to prune back the flowers. So I let her go. And as I hang up, I hold the phone there by my ear, listening to the silence on the other end for a few minutes, and find myself troubled with the way her words have lingered all this time. But even as I place a hand on my belly, I catch my mind stumbling over the words again, "I hope you will be disappointed" lurking in the corridor of all that is to bloom.

Crow

BY KATELIN STANLEY

Bobbing black head
Swagger like a champ
Sleek, downy sides, liquid tar
Seated on scaly legs, black dragons' tails
With talons, impish, not sharp
Eyes of onyx, beak opaque,
Obsidian shard
From whence the sharp calls
Of hollow mouth
A toy filled with sand
But smart, he remains
Aviator in a tailored dinner jacket
Bright is his eye's white glimmer
As he picks up a morsel and
In a flash of shadows
Disappears

The Fall of Larch

BY MATT KLEMSZ



A Matter of Taste

By MEGAN LESTER

The empty coffee pot was enough to convince Margot she would be getting a divorce, and her wedding was still weeks away. True, she was prone to dramatic reflection in the early hours, especially when uncaffeinated. Yet Margot felt, staring at the shallow ring of coffee left at the bottom of the pot, that Todd was perhaps her least favorite person in the world. “Long is the way and hard, that out of hell leads up to light,” Margot whispered, placing the coffee pot on the counter.

It was hard to catch Todd in the act of being an asshole. Every day Margot tried to find some indiscretion, some concrete event, which would justify her leaving him. Unfortunately, Todd’s assholery was well masked by a thick facade of niceness. In fact, everyone seemed to *really like* Todd except his fiancée.

Margot’s phone hummed. “Don’t forget your appointment!”

Only Todd would spell out a-p-p-o-i-n-t-m-e-n-t in a text message, the douche. And she hadn’t forgotten! Of all Margot’s flaws, forgetfulness was not one. If anything, Margot’s problem was remembering. That was why she had an appointment in the first place. Margot felt that all her remembering was beginning to weigh her down. The morning’s empty coffee pot now balanced atop yesterday’s weather report in Margot’s mind. She could almost feel it teetering on the edge of some synapse (or maybe that’s not how memory works?) Regardless, carrying all these memories left Margot exhausted, and she begrudgingly agreed to visit Dr. Bieler after Todd’s bajillionth request. Margot told herself she was only going to humor Todd, but she secretly hoped therapy would be some giant bin where she could dump the coffee pot and the weather report and her mother’s voice.

“And what’s wrong with Todd?” Dr. Bieler was actually holding a clipboard. He had a trimmed goatee, but it didn’t look gross. Margot had been preparing for this question on the drive over—in fact, she asked herself the same question every single day. Sitting in the clean, white office, though,

an answer arose which Margot hadn't constructed in all the months of her engagement. Her reply slinked out of the jumbled mess of memory cluttering her mind, and she was shocked to find it had been sitting there all along.

"About a month after Todd and I became engaged, I rented *Purple Rain* on DVD. I don't know why. I had to make an account at a video rental place, and pay some dumb fee, and I knew it was only a matter of months before the place would shut down. But I just had to watch *Purple Rain*. Have you seen it?"

Dr. Bieler shook his head.

"Well it's a great film. Prince stars in it, and the soundtrack is purely Prince's music. Ok, maybe I exaggerated when I said it's great...the film might actually be terrible. But I absolutely love it. I love Prince. I love it all. You know what I love most about it?"

"Hm?"

"It doesn't make any sense. None of the dialogue is justified. Prince will say something mean to his girl, and she'll laugh, and then Prince will flirt, and then she'll get angry, and then they'll have sex. Every scene your brain tries to figure out what's going on, but it can't. None of the characters react to one another in a natural way."

"That sounds annoying."

"No! It's great. I feel like I hold my breath through the entire movie. So I rent *Purple Rain*, and then I have to buy some weed—oh! Can I say that here?"

"Confidentiality."

"Right. Well I have to buy some weed, because it just enhances the *Purple Rain* experience, you see. But I haven't smoked since college. So I have to go to my neighbor's high school son and buy this little Ziploc baggie from him, like some sneaky teenager. I go up to this pimple-y kid who's outside

skateboarding, afraid his mom will come out and catch us. It was so embarrassing! But I knew it would be totally worth it."

"Was it?"

"At first, yes. Todd came home from work and I was absolutely giddy. I told him I got a movie, and I asked him if he still had his piece from college. He was surprised, but also weirdly excited. We started smoking—I coughed up half a lung—and then we started the movie."

"Todd didn't like the movie?"

"Todd loved the movie. But... but he laughed at all the wrong parts."

"How do you mean?"

"I can't explain it. He just laughed at all the wrong parts. He treated it like any other movie. Like, we could have gotten high and watched *Caddyshack* and he would have had the same reaction. Does that make sense?"

Dr. Bieler nodded. "And that bothers you?"

"Damn right it bothers me! *Purple Rain* is genius. This experience was sacred, but for Todd it was just watching a movie."

"Todd didn't appreciate it enough?"

"It's not that he didn't appreciate it enough... he just appreciates everything equally. ...I don't think Todd has any taste."

"Things are replaceable for Todd."

Margot opened her eyes, not realizing she had closed them. Her neck was hinged back, her gaze on the ceiling, which looked chalky. Margot imagined the chalkiness against her teeth. "I need a divorce."

"You're not married."

A Proposal

BY HOPE DORMAN



The Reflecting Pool

By AJ DAVIES

There is a pool deep within the forest
At the edge of our dreams with a trail
That many venture down
With various dispositions
There are those with eyes for the horizon
Yet leaves and branches are all they see
Roots to catch their feet
And dirt to kiss their lips when they fall
Their faces turn up with anguish and despair
Not realizing the pool was below their stare
There are those with eyes for mirrors
Always looking behind to where they have come
Never seeing the slapping branches nor
The strangling vines
Turning themselves in circles for fear of the path and
A pool with nothing but an unfamiliar face and a blank sky
There are those with eyes for the journey
Embracing every new flower as a gift
Savoring each moment as if it were a last meal
Losing themselves in the path because
They will find the pool when they do
The pool will always be there
And we won't

Bodega Bay

By AMANDA ADAMS



Cliff Walk at Pourville - Monet 1882

BY CARLYE MEISBURGER

He sought beauty in the classics,
but preferred the teachings
of the sun.

Cliffs above the sea,
painted in morning,
faces blurred just enough
to be a dream.

Some days are meant to be solidified,
serenity fixed in blue
vitality embedded in green
bliss mingled in the pink
of young wild flowers

reminding us
perfection
does not require walls.

I want to drink the paint,
sip the colors from the canvas
until my blood becomes
that azure sea.

A Collection of Glass Jars

BY SAMANTHA STEELE

Welcome to the Dinner Party, Mr. Macabre

"Why, good evening! Welcome to the dinner party, Mr. Macabre. May I take your coat?" Mrs. Livingston ushered him through the door, snow and cold wind billowing in.

"That would be lovely," he replied, removing his hat and long black suit coat. He began to pluck the sleeves loose of his tailed blazer and undo his cravat.

"Mr. Macabre!"

"Just one more thing," he brushed his hand dismissively. He grabbed either side of his face and gave his head a light wiggle, and like a silk gown he withdrew his skin from beneath his clothes. The skeleton of Mr. Macabre handed over the floppy, tan sack. "I'm sorry I'm a touch late. Don't mind me as I make my way over to the kitchen for a little refreshment!"

Life of the Party

Laughter erupted, women doubled over in their satin red gowns. Men had to clutch their sides. With another punchline nailed, Ms. Wells was clearly the life of the party. "Ah, it kills me," she smiled, wiping a tear from her eye. But inside she felt her heart and organs weakening by the hour, deteriorating faster with every joke.

The Writer

"I write! I'm a poet by trade!" The girl of his dreams wasn't interested. She turned away from him, trying to ignore him better.

The job trader sat with him, nodding along with quiet disappointment to his story. "I knew I should have bid on investment banker," the poet sighed. "If I can't win her love, at least I could have bought it."

Wax

Mr. Smith loved his one-story house made of wax. One day, because he forgot to turn the air conditioning on, the sun was too hot and it started to melt the roof. As the ceiling began to drip onto him and cover him in plastic goo, he sighed in happy wonder. "Now nothing can ever hurt me," he smiled, embalmed in real estate.

The Cliffs by the Sea

The cliff stood tall and proud, a stoic and lovely monolith. And the ocean would sit still, speechless with admiration. One day it began to wave, crashing into the cliff a couple times, soon a hundred, and suddenly countless times until endlessly and endlessly it crashed into the land. Every day the cliff wore away, until a long, beautiful sandy beach stretched out where they once stood. "Why did you do this!" the once-cliff cried. "You ruined everything about me!"

"Because I'm in love with you," the ocean sobbed. "And if all I can do is kiss you, then I'll do that for the rest of my life."

The Dreamer

The dreamer lay awake most nights. She couldn't wait to escape into her world of filling out tax forms, brushing teeth, and sitting in the lobby for a doctor's appointment. Reality was such a bore to her, getting lost in a labyrinth on the way to an extravagant dinner party, or opening the door to your house to an aquarium full of octopi to swim with, or dogs that jump from planes and become firefighters. Some nights she was so excited to dream that she couldn't fall asleep at all.

Darling

"Darling, I'm a writer!" he cried, trying to explain it to her. But he could already see that the brightness had passed from her eyes. He had so few words left to say to her. And words are all I have, he thought miserably. She left that night, with a note on the door, misspellings and grammar errors everywhere.

A Collection of Glass Jars

She used to collect air from all over the world. Whenever she traveled, she had a glass mason jar and ceremonially she'd step off the plane, scoop it in front of her, and "collect" the air. She had gone to all the continents in the world and even the middle of some of the oceans, and had a shelf in her room for her jars. In fact, above the shelf it said, "A Collection of Air from All Over the World." Once, in the middle of the night, an earthquake hit and smashed all the jars and let loose all her captured air. So she gathered all the shards and put them in a jar and relabeled her shelf to say, "A Collection of Earthquakes from All Over the World."

Noodle

BY GUANGJU WEI



Vite

BY CLARE MUNGER

His back is a battlefield.
Leathery mounds of scar tissue
reside on the shoulders
that used to carry me.

I once chased ill-fated pigeons
in the Champs-Élysées gardens.
"Vite ma chérie, vite!" he encouraged.
Faster I ran.

I once raced with untied shoelaces
around Stanley lake.
"Vite ma chérie, vite!" he cheered.

I once pretended to faint during a pitiful race.
I preferred his face be worried, not disappointed.
I was not his vite chérie.

My legs no longer chase pigeons
or run around lakes.
They take me to Giverny, Beirut, and
someday Kathmandu.

Now, he does not want me to go
faster, faster, faster.

My back is still flush,
no protruding scars,
I hope one day
it is a battlefield.

Catch and Release

BY ERIN BRESKA

"Loop the tail of the line one, two, three, four, five, six times around the leading strand and then back through the hole. Now, pull the tail snugly and you have your cinch knot, see?" my grandfather says, as he demonstrates a new knot to me. Eyes wide with excitement, I watch as he inverts his shoulders, keenly engrossed in clipping off the excess line from the feathery fly with unsteady hands. His jade green Cabela's fly fishing vest hugs his lean body and the soft tinkering sounds of the needle-nose pliers and tippet spools dangle against his shallow chest. He wears jeans with a sewn patch on the left knee, the non-matching thread woven into the denim depicting what looks like a poorly crafted spiderweb. His furrowed brow marks his concentration as he rubs an opaque floatant gel on the wings of the fly in a circular motion with his thumb and forefinger. Smearing the remains of the gel on his pants, he stands up, reels up the loose line, and motions for me to follow him.

We approach the sandy bank where the river licks at my feet. I hope that my small Velcro sneakers will protect my dry socks, and the thought of cold feet makes my toes curl. The frothing swells of the river dance and glide around the smooth rocks, like tiny ballerinas effortlessly twirling onstage. The river, a constant murmur, and the chirps of the early birds amiably greet us. I look around, quickly blinking at the sunless canyon we are standing in. Trees cover the mountainside like an emerald blanket and inhaling the crisp air tickles my nose. Earlier that morning, my mom bundled my stubborn self into two heavy jackets I am now grateful for. Pulling the outer zipper to the top of its track, I proceed to burrow my neck deeper into the flannel that smells of campfire. It seems as if we have been on the bank for hours and are finally greeted by the warm morning sun that peaks through the dense branches of the tall evergreen trees surrounding us.

The bamboo rod, now a golden yellow in the soft light, patiently waits to be used, to be whipped gracefully back and forth in the air like the unraveling of a cowboy's lariat. Its gleaming varnish reminds me of tree sap nearing the end of its gravitational journey down the trunk while still maintaining its shiny appearance, seconds away from crystallizing. I also am

waiting for my grandfather to cast his line, envying the simple flick of his wrist, the natural and beautiful movement of his body leaning in and out, shifting his weight to become synced with the cast. His hands grip the cork handle, manipulating the direction of the cast with the slightest movement of his protracted fingers. The whistling zip of the line getting tugged through the air makes me eager to hold the rod in my own hands, to practice both the power and finesse that my wrist can exhibit. SLISHHH. The line is stripped from the water's surface. SLISH. My grandfather extends his strong arm back, effortlessly keeping the line in a mid-air state of stillness. SLISH. The line catapults through the air again like a bungee cord sprung loose, depositing the delicate fly on top of the water. Before long, his crooked smile drifts momentarily across his still face; he is satisfied with his cast. Trailing the line on the surface of the water, my grandfather slowly wiggles the supple rod as the fly weightlessly swirls from one dark pool to the next, teasing its hungry suitors below.

A quick, silver flash cuts the surface of the water and my grandfather calmly lifts the rod and then hands it to me. "Hold the pole up high to prevent him from spitting the hook, hon," he says. Hon, his term of endearment for me, makes me feel safe on this cold morning. The rod sporadically tugs in my small hands. My breathing quickens. I yank the bamboo high above my head, unaware of my exaggerated action. To an observer, it must look like I am clumsily fencing against some unseen opponent. Chuckling, my grandfather envelopes my hands with his, and his leathery skin gently scratches mine. Together we fight the silver outline that appears and disappears amongst the round stones beneath the gin-like water. Letting the reel scream as the fish rapidly jets downstream, we quickly strip the line in as the fish reverses direction. It's a game of tug-of-war for me now, but to the fish, it is a struggle between life and death. A dorsal fin abruptly cuts the water and the thrashing of a speckled tail elicits a brief splash. Nearing defeat, another flash of silver now exposes its iridescent underside. The fish barrel rolls in an attempt to free itself. Finally, the yanking weakens and the swimming slows before we can slide the twenty-inch rainbow onto the shore. I look down at my hands, tightly grasping the reel; surface veins pulsate rhythmically.

The fish flails its body in its now waterless environment, struggling to breathe. Its round, black eyes unblinking; its jaws open and close, desperate-

ly seeking water. I cannot pull my eyes away from its now rigid form. I watch as the deep red gills lift up and down like small billows, trying to find oxygen. My grandfather crunches over the pebbly bank with his dusty work boots and bends down to free the fish. "Should we let it go?" he asks. I quickly nod in agreement. I become anxious. My eyes fixate on its gills lifting and collapsing, lifting and collapsing more slowly now. Unclamping the pliers from his vest, my grandfather swiftly detaches the tiny hook from the lip of the fish and tosses the fly near the pole that now lies gently against a clump of thick reeds.

Careful not to grip too tightly, my cold hands cradle the trout from below; the gills are still moving. Its strong body, encompassed by metallic scales, flashes like show lights. A viscous film that coats its skin gifts my hands with an unpleasant odor. My grandfather clasps his hands over mine again, and we stumble to the water's edge. My hands are interposed between the silky yet slimy body of the fish and my grandfather's overworked, dry hands; a perfect dichotomy. A worn, gold wedding band suspends loosely on his left finger. Some of his fingers have trapped blood under the nails, now dried and black from years of plumbing work, being a Navy sailor, and chopping firewood in his older age. Other fingernails have grown back oddly, resembling the marbled bark of a white oak tree. Yet these nails, exposed to years of work and toil, still manage to protect my grandfather's fingers from harm.

We take a few steps into the river and submerge our hands, allowing the cold water to rush between our fingers and rejuvenate the fish. My shoes, once warm, flood with water and cause me to gasp quietly. Bubbles surface, ridding any last bit of hope that my drowned socks will still be warm and dry. I focus my attention back on the trout as its gills brush against my skin, increasing now with speed. Its body anxiously slithers back and forth in the net-like confinement of our hands. We loosen our hold and it slips back into the shadowed depths of the river. I wipe my hands on my jeans, ridding them of the smell and remaining water droplets. Trying to process what just happened, I stand feebly on the bank, gazing in the direction that the fish swam, admiring its vivacity.

Stretching out my hands, I examine my own fingers: the slightly grooved wrinkles on each knuckle; a pencil-line scar on my left index finger

from my puppy's sharp teeth; the small, pale freckles stippling my skin; and the thin, perfect white crescent moons encasing the tips of my pink fingernails. The grooves on my fingers and hands, tiny canyons shaped by time and experiences, are what capture the delicate memories of my life. They are witnesses, holding the power to access the carefully stored recollections in my mind. My hands are bursting with silent stories, transcribing exactly what I am creating with my grandfather in this moment. I look up at my grandfather and grin. The sun, now emerging through the tops of the tree branches, casts dancing shadows on his warm face as he smiles back. I take off one of my jackets now, and he stumbles over a rock, retrieving the bamboo pole. We walk back to the car, hand-in-hand, discussing our luck at having landed such a big fish. "That sure was a good catch, hon," my grandfather says. Yes, I think it was a good catch indeed.

Mobes

BY ANA FONSECA



Mid-February

BY MEGAN LESTER

Noticing a black pool on the ground,
I stretch my hand over the darkness,
expecting to see my arm reflected
in a puddle.

But the black pool was a shadow,
and my hand another shadow,
making a blacker silhouette
in the not-puddle.

A brief disappointment.
I had wanted to see my arm
waving up at its twin.

How much, I thought
could be held
in a pool of water.

Low Polly

By SAMUEL COLOSIMO



French-Cut Feminism

By COITO

Whenever I walk into Macy's, my eyes are assaulted by images of orange women with toned stomachs, breasts spilling out of their padded bras, and waxed labias (nobody has pubic hair that allows underwear to fall that smoothly over their crotches). Even worse are the women I see, who, despite the brilliance of their curvaceous bodies, clutch triangles of lace and silk in their hands and seem to look to the pubeless orange ladies for advice. When did we start to depend on the image of adolescent representations of femininity for fashion counsel? We need to set our sights on older women.

Every morning, I do myself a favor and put on a fresh pair of cotton blend, French-cut granny panties. There's something about the way the elastic waistband sits above my brown stretch marks. The way my tush looks in khakis, accentuated by the panty lines. The way I can count on some line of lace not being up my crack when I walk. All my lady things are in their place, cozied up together next to the cotton, not shoved up inside of me like stuffing in a Thanksgiving turkey. I am not a fucking bird. I am a woman.

Not only are most women overly obsessed with a beauty standard that prioritizes sex appeal over comfort, reveres hairless pussies, and resembles the average twelve-year-old—many men are, too. While standing in line for lunch one day, I heard one man behind me say, "I hate it when girls wear granny panties with their yoga pants. Wear a thong, we don't want to see those panty lines." Patriarchy abounds. Sex appeal is not one-size-fits-all. We're not dressing for you. We're dressing for ourselves, for our ability to express what's in every groove of our intricately beautiful brains, for our vaginas. Vagina is power. That gorgeous gathered collection of feminine folds cannot be handed over to the Man. It needs to menstruate all over the Man and wear whatever it wants.

Something awakens inside of me when I let my Portuguese pubes grow into their natural chaos and allow my tummy room to breathe with the help of my granny panties. I appreciate knowing that everything is able to be as it is. When I pull my underwear over my unshaved legs and unapolo-

getically well-acquainted thighs, I send a symbolic middle finger out to the universe and take care of myself the best way I know how.

Despite all this, being in the Macy's lingerie section is still a trying task for the radical feminist within me. But instead of focusing on the hands clutching triangles of lace and silk and the orange women, I swing my hips over to Jockey's underwear display, throwing my curves in the faces of the airbrushed advertisements. I get my new box of French-cuts.

Untitled

BY ANDREA HERNANDEZ-GARIBAY



Smile

BY MEG CROWLEY

I rose at the sight of your green Passat pulling up to the curb. I slid inside, clipped my seat belt on, then we were on our way. I faced you. "Are you ready?"

"Jane," you replied in your spun-sugar voice, "I swore on my teddy bear that I would find my birth mother."

"I remember the sleepover when you did that. How old were we, six?"

"Yep." A smile tugged at the corner of your mouth. "Twelve years ago. I'm a big girl now. I'm going to meet her." You were already the world to your adoptive parents, whom you loved unconditionally, but one of your major hallmarks was that you were always true to your word. "I've dreamt so many times about today." You turned onto the highway.

"I know," I said, remembering last week right after finals when we'd locked ourselves in your dorm room with my Mac, copies of your adoption papers, and a freezer full of Ben & Jerry's. We vowed not to sleep until we found your birth mother's home address. Our first Google search of Rowena Levin had brought us to a website of a prestigious law firm which happened to be in Oakland—just miles away from UC Berkeley. After twenty minutes of explaining your predicament to the law firm's secretary, you had Rowena's address saved in your iPhone. And here we were, driving down College Avenue to 5359 Manila Avenue to scope out the life you could've had.

"I wonder what she's like." Your voice was thick with intrigue. Aside from being an exceptional lawyer, all we knew about Rowena from your adoption papers was that she was thirty-seven.

I pondered. "She's probably tall; wide-eyed and regal looking just like you."

You blushed and exited the freeway. "What if she doesn't like me?" Your voice was small as you turned onto Manila Avenue.

"Who wouldn't like you, Addie?"

You beamed and stopped the car in front of a cream-colored house about halfway down the block.

This was it.

"Good luck," I said, reading your wish-me-luck look.

Robotically, you unbuckled your seat belt and warily stepped out of the car. You climbed seven concrete stairs that were adorned with pictures of flowers and smiling suns in sidewalk chalk. The front lot was invaded by lush grass and void of weeds. Blue curtains blocked the view of the inside of the house. I watched you wait on the porch, then step inside.

Forty-five minutes later, I looked up to see you slide into the car. "How'd it go?"

You didn't speak. "Addie?" The silence itched like a mosquito bite.

A smile bloomed on your lips while a tear ran down your cheek. "Rowena Levin will never know," you said defiantly. You shed a few more tears, but the smile was still plastered on your face.

"Know what?" I kept my voice light, even though I was dying for details.

"How lucky I am. Thanks for coming with me today, Jane." Hastily, you started the car and drove away from the cream-colored house. You drove away from your birth mother, whom you never spoke of again.

Tree Hunting

BY NICHOLAS COOGAN



New Year's Eve

BY PHILIP ELLEFSON

when my dad gets home from work he asks me
to grab a beer with him. we drive to the bar
in the gray Toyota pickup and as we drink
i realize my father is trying
to give me something – an understanding,
a pillar to uphold me. he tells me
he approves of my career choice though it may
be unreliable. he tells me also
that my plan may not be God's plan, and although
i admit a distance has grown between God
and me, i cherish what he's trying to tell me.
but here's the thing: what he's really trying
to tell me is unsaid, for we are not only
American men but Scandinavian
Americans by way of Minnesota
and Seattle; we do not speak openly
about the hard things, so what he's really
trying to tell me gets buried. what he's
really trying to tell me is that life
is hard aloneness but he honestly loves me.
for this i am grateful. we step outside
into the searing crystal winter air
and the sun has dipped between the horizon's mounds
where a glow the color of embers yields
slowly to a vast blue-black dome dotted
with pricks of white. in the pickup truck
with my dad i nearly cry at the beauty
of a sunset.

around eight my parents' friends
show up for the party, people who used to talk
to me as a child and now initiate me
into the strange, stale conversations

of working adults. most of the partygoers grow
drowsy with mulled wine and leave before
two-thousand-fourteen disappears. the countdown
starts and ends and feels, as always, un-
ceremonious despite the fireworks
and cheap champagne.

i wait until my parents
go to bed to finish off the sweet warm wine
and make my way past piles of dishes (heaped
with scraps of the smorgasbord) to what's left
of the light framed in the mantel – searing wood
glowing the color of a cloudless winter
sunset in the darkened room and i'm drawn
to it, i get so close it starts to hurt.
this luscious drunk gravity would not be
so strong if someone else were here – my dad,
perhaps, the ember-glow glinting off his glasses
and his hairless head, throwing the right half
of his face into blackness. if he were here,
we could cast off our heritage and say it:
that togetherness can be only fleeting
and forgetful, a holiday party
interrupting the string of working days;
that the only permanence we can hope for
is the honest acknowledgment of shared
aloneness, which is a rich swell of gold-orange
fading into the ever-blackness – fathers
and sons, mothers and daughters, friends and lovers
glowing honest and alone with you
at some odd beginning.

Conversations with the Night

BY DANA COPPERNOLL-HOUSTON

About two years ago, I decided to beachcomb the late night and early morning surf. I suppose I wanted the beach to myself, as if it was a thing that I could own. I desired to be among the few who braved the cold night and came back triumphantly clutching a treasure of my own. So my brother and I made a pact to steal down to the surf at midnight.

During the day, Seaside's beach is long enough to stretch into the foggy distance. The dry sand lays for half the beach before the stealthy soaking of seawater creates a cold, packed floor. It was here, where the ocean and the land meet, dubiously sharing a space they each claimed for themselves, that I longed to search.

Midnight. As we stumbled down the path to the water's edge, increasingly relying on the lights of our cellphones, I became aware of the absolute darkness in front of me. We topped the dunes and scrambled down to the dry, loose sand. Standing in the chill of night, sand having yet again found its way into my sandals, I was confronted with the Pacific Ocean.

On the moonless coast at midnight, the only light comes from streetlamps and houses behind the scratchy dune grass. This close to civilization, the city and all its humanity blots out even the stars. Looking west across the Pacific only reveals the occasional blurry white wave crest; not even the horizon is visible in the black. Instead, the transition from sea to sky is muddy and indistinct, as if, far out into the surf, I might suddenly find my ship floating into the heavens by some accident of fate. The endless expanse of ocean is merely suggested by the thunderous crashing of the waves, a sound somehow muted during the day, but terrifying in its vastness at night. There is no way of telling where the black waters meet the shore until cold waves bite suddenly numb feet. The only greeting is an invisible wall of sound.

I was always taught to treat the ocean with a mix of respect and fear. The water is painfully cold, even under the summer sun. Rip currents running along the coast claim experienced swimmers every year. The great waves

toss entire trees onto the land that savage storms ripped out by their roots. This ocean is no friend of mine. An uncaring deity, it swallows everything it is offered.

That night, I could not bring myself to look at the ocean. Every time I tried to conquer the darkness and roar of the waves, it crashed over me with merciless ferocity. The lessons of my childhood burned bright in my mind that night—never turn your back on the ocean. I could not turn away but I could not face the black in front of me either. I was a small speck of sand on the shore, a footprint to be washed away at high tide.

My brother felt the same frightening spirit that night as I did. We managed to stay only a few minutes, dragging our leaden feet to the beginning of the wet sand before abandoning any thought of beachcombing. We turned our backs on the ocean and scrambled home.

Another summer, another night. This time I turned my wheels east, not west. No crashing waves in my ears or salt spray in my face but dusty sun and rolling hills instead. I drove into central Oregon with a friend to see the stars above the Painted Hills. The high desert is almost an ocean in itself. The hills are velvet, undulating quietly under a harsh sun. Long-dead lake beds dot the landscape, marked by ranger stations and informative signs warning visitors not to remove the ancient fossils from their final resting place.

During the day, we enjoyed the quiet orange, brilliant blue, and rusty brown of the desert. At night, we drove from our campsite down the mountain to our stargazing spot and stretched out on top of our van's metal roof. The plains stretched out in front of us, invisible in the darkness. But our gazes turned not towards the far-off horizon, but upwards to the heavens.

In our hemisphere, the Milky Way is often visible during summer nights, although few ever see it. Only the brightest of distant suns show in the busy, congested metropolises of the modern age; no one takes the time to look up for a handful of dying fireflies. Out away from the orange-tinted blur all cities emit into the night, however, the wide, twirling swath of stars stretches starkly across an ocean of black, seemingly forever.

The deep ocean of the universe hung over my head, made weightless by the flickers of billions of dust motes. Every point of light had a hundred siblings, seemingly within arm's reach. Every blank spot on the canvas was composed of smaller and fainter dots. Punctuating the starry sky was the occasional streak of white ink, as driftwood from an ancient comet ended its long journey in a brief, unintentional scribble on the canvas.

Though the surrounding hills sat solid and no crashing waves sounded in the darkness, I was still unnerved by other sounds. Every cricket, owl, and rodent in a ten-mile radius seemed to be chirping, screeching, and shrieking at the still-moonless sky. At first I was hemmed in by the sounds, paralyzed. If I sat up on the van, my position seemed precarious; I could fall at any moment into the night around me. My solace was the stars. They were my grounding wire to drown out the sounds of the night. The sky held me down to the earth. We watched the stars peacefully until the biting cold desert forced us to retreat back up the mountain to our campsite.

I feel small and large, peaceful and afraid in the darkness. I seem to find a new truth every time I walk into the night, yet still I leave in wonder. Something inexplicable draws me to dark places, these bastions of sounds and silences, but the same mysterious force pushes me away until, despite the beauty and mystery of the night, or perhaps because of it, I turn my back to run home.

Illusions

BY LEAH WALTERS



Red Lips

BY CAROLYN MUNRO

First moment in sight, you sit in the chair
Hair of spun gold spilled over your jacket
Pen erect on blank parchment before day
Eyes of everglades, shaded leaves of me.

Red lips part and form an unspoken word
Please, before sunset bathes the sky orange
The wine glass glints ruby opaque, drops cling
Soft picnic cheese rests on salted crackers.

Moonlight dances glinting off silver shoes
Stained glass windows, illuminated floor
Fingers intertwined in rotating spin
Whisper of cool wind between our bodies.

Morning beach rays glint in your haloed hair
Lips slightly parted hover over mine
Quiver of your body, lips faintly touch
Body concaves in silent surrender.

The everglade eyes meet the shaded leaves
Stream of classroom sunlight penetrates room
Good dreams are safe when prisoned in the mind
Red lips part and form an unspoken word.

Untitled

BY AHMED BASHANDI



Give Ev'ry Man Thy Ear

BY MEGAN RICHARDSON

In fifth grade, when most of my classmates were getting braces, I got plastic surgery. I got braces that year too, but the plastic surgery came first. Oh-toh-plasty. Reshaping my ears. Fixing them.

A boy in my class had one ear that didn't have a hole in it. It was as if someone had caulked it with melted wax. Peter was smart, ran fast during recess, had almost translucent skin and white-blond hair; on sunny days, you had to squint to see him if he was in the sun. Everyone liked him.

"It's a family tradition," my mother said when telling me I would be getting surgery. She lifted my heavy hair in one hand to frown at my ears, where the fold of skin would normally be there to hold them flat against my head instead of cocked out at an angle. It was her faulty genes that doomed me to surgery. My mother, who got her sensibility from her German immigrant grandmother, her looks from her English ancestry, and her insanity from God, got her ears from who-knows-where. They must have been genetic, because she passed them on to both her children, but neither of her parents was visibly afflicted.

My father's ears were large for his head, almost comically so, but pinned perfectly against his head in a sensible fashion. My mother's ears were small and shell-like like mine, as flat as my father's but artificially so, brought into line at some point years before I was born. She had thick ropes of scar tissue from her operation inside, on the back of, and on the scalp behind her ears. I had never actually seen them. She wore her hair down, brushed into a voluminous shoulder-length mass, to hide the scars. Only large gold studs winked through, and only sometimes, when she dressed up for business dinners with my father.

The fourth member of our family, my brother Ryan, had also subjected himself to the surgery. He was eighteen then, and to me he seemed impossibly tall, like all adults. I didn't know it then, but he was short for his age, not filled out, still not shaving. Maybe it was because of this that he played

with me—indoor soccer, driveway hockey—longer than any teenager should have wanted to entertain his ten-year-old sibling. At least then he could be the unqualified best at something. Our mother had high expectations for her children, but we spectacularly botched every goal in a way that brought her new misery each time, as if we'd done it on purpose to shame her, each successive letdown failing to alert her of our inconvenient fallibility.

My surgery was only a year or so after his operation—his own attempt to minimize the kind of ear-based humiliation I had never experienced. The image of him sitting up in bed, vomiting into the waste basket between his legs, his head swaddled in bandages, was still fresh in my mind.

"Your brother has always had a hard time with this sort of thing," my mother said at some point. Perhaps in the car, driving me to the hospital for the consultation. "He was always sick as a child. But you'll be fine. You don't complain."

* * * * *

I'm sitting on the crinkly paper covering the exam table, my bare feet dangling but far from brushing the floor. My mother is reading the paper, fanned out in front of her like the wings of a peacock, and there's a stilted silence occasionally broken by her turning the page or snapping its droopy edges upright. I sit perfectly still, not stirring the paper, breathing so quietly I can't hear myself. Then, the doctor: the door groaning open, his forceful nose-breathing, swinging a stool across the exam room with a practiced hand to sit down in front of me. He looks at me but speaks to my mother,

"How old is she?"

"She's ten."

"Going on eleven," I don't say.

"It's a good time for this," the doctor says. "Once they hit mid-teens, the cartilage gets tougher to work with."

He turns my head with four giant fingers, as if I'm one of the Barbie

dolls I play with in the attic. I bite the inside of my cheek, just a little; it's the most intimately anyone has touched me in months. He gently pulls my ear out, away from my head, moves it around in circles, probes where it meets my skull. I've never paid this much attention to my ears. They feel almost foreign to me now, like when your hand falls asleep and you touch it with your other hand. Finished with his examination, he wheels back again and speaks to my mother. I look down at my toes again, wriggling them, waving to myself.

* * * * *

They scheduled it during spring break. The year before, we had gone to Hawaii. Most days I was dropped off at the glorified resort daycare to glue shells and sand to paper plates with other people's kids. But in the afternoons, my brother would come pick me up and we'd go to the video store at the resort and rent whatever movies we wanted. He picked most days. My favorite movie was "The Hunt for Red October." I was a bit young to understand the Cold War, but I liked the scene where the Russians all sang their anthem in proud tones that rang through the ocean and into the American submarine.

On one of my few days of family time, boogie boarding for the first time ever, I fell over backward into the seawater with my eyes open. I screamed, my eyes and throat filling with saltwater and sand, and my mother pulled me out by my upper arm, marching me—blind, snot and tears and saltwater coating my face in that putrescent way that only seems to happen to kids—back to our villa, gripping my upper arm. "I told you not to do that," she said, and she had. I could hear her taut expression, her rightness, even if I couldn't bear to open my eyes.

* * * * *

"What do you want to do after your surgery?" my father said from the front seat. I wasn't sure why he was coming, absentee that he was even now that he lived at home. For the first six years of my life, he worked in California and flew up on the weekends on the earliest Saturday flight. Having two parents was still new to me.

"Jim, she won't be in any shape—" my mother chastised, but I was already speaking.

"I want to get a German pancake!" The insubstantial puff, half-eggs and half-pancake, dusted with powdered sugar and liberally coated in maple syrup (by me), was my elusive breakfast item, my white whale. Baked in the oven, it puffed up like a soufflé and collapsed if not eaten straightaway. We didn't often go out for breakfast, but I always ordered a German pancake, each time buoyed by the hope that it would still be puffy, even though it was always sadly deflated and wrinkled by the time it reached me.

"We'll see how you feel afterward," she said.

* * * * *

They didn't put me under all the way. I was too young for that, so they gave me an IV—my mother squeezing my hand to distract from the pinch, her fingers cold and smooth—that made me half-asleep. I couldn't really move or feel anything, but I could hear the doctor and his assistants working around me. Halfway through, my legs started to ache from being so still, covered by what felt like lead blankets, so I flexed my ankles, but it didn't feel better at all, so I started to kick a little, and then more, throwing off the blankets with every strike, and felt good. But then they made me fall asleep, for real this time.

I open my eyes and the doctor is standing over me. He wants to show me what he did, offering it for approval, like when my parents order wine at a restaurant and they pour small glasses first to be sniffed and swirled. He's holding a mirror so I can see myself: I am small, too-pale. The ear he shows me is bone-white, surrounded by purple blotches like a gruesome bruise. Flat. I realize I never asked if I'd still be able to put my hair behind my ears. But I can't move my lips, still awake-asleep, and can't ask him to put things back the way they were.

"How do you like it? It went very well. It looks great," the doctor says. But he's not asking me, he's talking to himself, like at the dentist when the lady asks questions with her fingers in your mouth but she doesn't want you to answer. I fall asleep again.

* * * * *

I wake up in a giant bed, perched in the middle like an egg in a nest. I can't hear; the bandages tight around my head muffle everything, like being in water and hearing the rhythm of someone speaking but not the sounds they're making.

The doctor and my mother are talking, but my father is reading the newspaper in a chair nearby so I say to him, "Can I still put my hair behind my ears?" He looks up and gets up to ask the doctor, nods. It's such a relief. That's all I wanted.

Later in the car, I ask, "Can we go to Elmer's?" I'm not sure if anyone heard me, so I say it again, louder. My mother looks at my father and my father looks at me in the rear view mirror, a framed pair of eyes. "Jim," I see-don't-hear my mother say, and I can imagine her tone.

"I will have hot chocolate please and a German pancake," I tell the waiter when we sit down. It's 4 p.m. and the only other diners are old people. Some of them look over at me for too long to be polite. I stare back. "You look like you had a lobotomy," I read my mother's lips, curled and half-scandalized, but I sit cocooned in my bandage turban, sipping hot chocolate and waiting for my pancake, certain it will arrive puffy and golden.

Veleros

BY MARISSA QUINONES

Llévame al mar
Así puedo disfrutar los sabores y olores
Y todo lo que veo

Llévame al mar
Donde puedo oír a
Los niños jugando por la orilla
Donde puedo oler
Un dulce día de verano
Donde puedo ver
Rayos del sol
Brillando en la distancia

Llévame al mar
Donde puedo oler
Arena granulada a lo largo de la costa
Donde puedo oír
Gritos de alegría de los niños
Donde puedo saborear
Olas saladas hasta contra mi cubierta

Llévame al mar
Donde puedo oír
Palmeras luchando en el viento
Donde puedo sentir
Salpicas tímidas de las olas
Donde puedo apreciar
Amaneceres y atardeceres
De calor tórrido de julio

Llévame al mar
Así puedo saludarles con mis velas
Y dejar que las algas
Cepillen mis lados de madera
Y dejar que los peces
Naden debajo de mí casualmente

Llévame al mar
Así puedo jugar en las olas
Y así puedo apreciar el verano
Como los niños
Jugando en la costa
Y enamorándose de la brisa de verano

The Camp

BY SARAH WEAVER

My cousins and I ran through the tall grass, weaving through trees, pigtails flying. We'd played Red Rover and hide-and-go-seek all morning. Hunger whined but noon would bring hot dogs. We reached our aunt's camp and slowed down. We were looking for our cousin Jonathan.

I leaned down to scratch a mosquito bite. I was freckled with them, and scabs from scratching. The more fun we had at our family's campground, the more trophies we won.

"Maybe he's in here." Gabby said, dumping dirt from her sandal. We climbed the front steps and opened the door. The Camp's rules were more about snakes and cow pies than knocking.

We heard voices.
It was dim, after the sunshine.
We huddled near the door, blind.
We didn't mean to eavesdrop. We 'd been taught not to interrupt.
I heard snuffling. One of us whispered, "Should we look?"

No time to answer.
Someone yelled, "But it's not fair! They were only babies!"

Aunt Loena was trying to be patient.
"Derrick, stop crying and listen to me," she said.
Her breathing was loud.

"Babies grow up and cause damage. We had to kill them now before they could grow up. We couldn't just let them go. I'm sorry, you hear me?"

Our eyes rounded and mouths opened.
I looked around the room for dead babies.
My eyes were adjusted now, but no babies or blood.
We silently stared at each other.

Edging to a different angle, I saw half of Derrick, lying facedown on the sofa.

"They were so cute!" Derrick howled, his almost-manly voice cracking. "They didn't do anything wrong!"

"But they would have, you have to believe me. I can't do this all day."
We hadn't noticed her voice getting closer until she appeared in the doorway.
She looked stressed.
We looked guilty.
"Girls, y'all should go play," she said.

I was the oldest. I cleared my throat. "What's wrong?"

She sighed. "Your uncle found a nest of armadillos under his camp. He had to kill them all. They burrow and mess the foundation up."

The sunshine wasn't as glorious.
The hunger wasn't as strong.
We sat on tree roots, lost in thought.

Babies could be killed if they were the wrong species. Teenage boys could weep if their hard exterior couldn't hold.

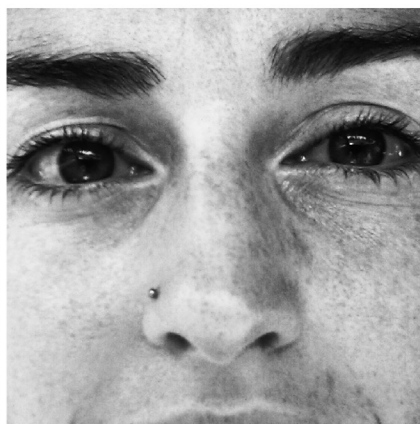
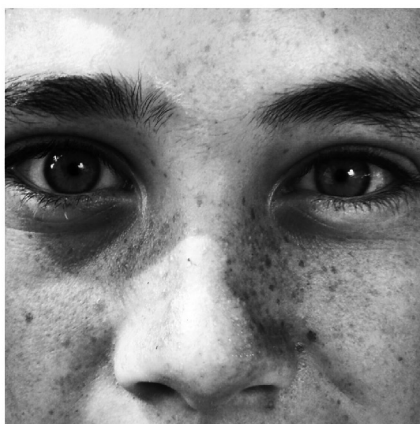
Wild Innocence

BY KATELIN STANLEY



Summer Portrait

BY HALLIE HOLLAND



Home

BY HALLIE HOLLAND

I'm standing in front of the call box shaking, jet-lagged in spite of the two days I've already been in the country. I know these words, I know these words, I repeat to myself. You've been learning this language for 13 years; you're fine. No you're not! You'll mess up. Trust me, they won't understand you! My thoughts tangle, contradicting each other, inspiring no confidence. I hesitate again, reach out toward the brass button labeled with her name, rest my finger there without depressing it, breathe. "Disculpa." "Excuse me." I pivot to see a couple, stroller in tow, keys in hand. I let them pass, then do the cowardly thing and follow them inside.

A young mother died December 30th at the hands of her 2-year-old son. He accidentally fired a loaded pistol at her during a family outing to Wal-Mart in Hayden, Idaho. She had been carrying the weapon in her purse, which she carelessly placed next to her toddler in a shopping cart child seat. Veronica Ruteledge also had several other small children with her. Ironically, the woman had firearm training and was a nuclear research scientist. The tragic accident comes at the heels of two similar incidents, one in Washington State, the other in Pennsylvania, which occurred earlier in the year.

After a snow, a great, white, uniform sheet of flakes clothes the Earth; a billion icy fragments become one cohesive mass that belies the unique nature of each of its components. Every tiny flake a staggering 10¹⁹ water droplets, condensing and coalescing to form complex crystals, each different from the next.

Digging our heel points into the ice, we perched on the knife ridge, looking south. From the east, the sun crept lazily up from the jagged horizon line. We hadn't been able to see anything further than a few feet from our faces since midnight. The difference that rotating our bodies 180 degrees made was stunning, laying the whole of Oregon, bathed in pinkish light, beneath us. We breathed in the view. On the way home, we stopped in front of the Sandy police station. Exhausted and happy, we slept in the sun-drenched front seat of the car.

More tragedy in Idaho on January 10th as a 29-year-old man killed three beloved community members and critically wounded a fourth in Moscow: John Lee murdered his adoptive mother at home before moving on to Northwestern Mutual Bank where he shot two men, one his landlord, who died. He then traveled to a local Arby's where he attacked the manager. She died later. He fled to nearby Pullman, Washington, where he was caught and is now fighting extradition.

Vibrant yellows, reds and oranges flare between pointed green leaves. The bright fruits are vigil candles beneath the vaulted ceiling of the plant. Evenly spaced, uniform and silent: a perfect row of pew-seated parishioners. Each tiny tomato awaits its turn to be plucked from the fuzzy vine, some of them splitting in the process, spilling myriad golden seeds through their wounded flesh. The acidic juice smells of summer.

Among Giants

BY JACK HULBERT



If a Tree Falls in a Forest

BY ASHLEY ASAHINA

I don't need ears to know
that it fell, for the vibration it generates
flows through my veins and has plugged
my ears with the ashes of humanity's evolution.
I crave the fallen; the stamp of wisdom's ambiance we so uphold
carved within the stumps of our ancestors
and into the pencils of scholars. I listen without hearing;

lightning that struck its first victim crackling
lovingly through the dead of
winter's brutal chill, shrieks of an
aghast newborn as it broadcasts life for the
first time through tiny lungs, sighs of
shade as it coos gently at the heat-stroked, chirps of
birds and the howls of apes, furious clicking and scribbling on
sheets that determine humankind's future, the gasp of
life inhaled in the wind, groans of industrialization and
agricultural means, the
first juicy crunch of sin that casted Adam and Eve
to the depths of Earth.

I must listen carefully, delicately, as to catch the source of
vibration's waves tickling the tips of my ears. There are those
who have the audacity to ask whether a fallen tree's
lament makes a sound. For them I ask this,

When the last tree falls in the forest,
Will the world make a sound?

Standing Giant

BY MATT KLEMSZ



Reflections on a Year

BY KATE GARCIA

Low point: driving around at nine o'clock on a Thursday night eating Taco Bell by myself. I order three items off the menu so that I will have the luxury of options. In my mind I call it the "Tacopocalypse." Don't worry though, I don't eat the entire Quesarito. For those of you not familiar with the world of "just add water" ass-food, that would be a burrito wrapped in a quesadilla with a generous layer of congealed, yellow, liquid-salt in between. Turn up the radio. Country music, of course. Almost run the red because blindly fishing around the bag for my tacos just isn't cutting it. The next 30 minutes is spent animatedly talking to myself while tears and nacho cheese languidly dribble down my chin.

High point: running down the middle of the boat docks, heading too fast toward the black water. My naked body breaks the surface and I am sinking, happily paralyzed by the warm innocuousness that is summer lake water and the feeling of skinny-dipping for the first time. After a million and one years I come back up to the surface and see my friends lined up on the edge of the dock, preparing to follow my daring precedent. Pale bodies, hunched against the bizarreness of public nudity. With a shriek, the glowing figures jump over my head and disappear into the jumbled silkiness behind me. I stay clutching the ladder and lean my head back into the water, looking up at the stars and letting childhood images of mermaids dictate the movements of my body.

Low point: drowning in my own mucous, trying to get an intelligible word out to my mom. Her silence is soggy with helplessness and the knowledge that nothing she says will be enough. I'm a kid. I'm just a kid stuck in this prematurely accelerated life, unsuccessfully crawling my way back to a time when being young wasn't just an excuse for bad behavior but a reason to play and laugh and imagine and rely on anyone but yourself to come up with the answers. My mom doesn't have practice with this. My sister is not one to talk to others out of unhappiness. So we sit there. On the phone, neither of us speaking. Both of us afraid to hang up. Feeling like I really don't want to talk to anyone right now. But having the option is nice.

High point: sitting on the carpet of my sister's bedroom eating pizza made in the back of a liquor store. Good pizza. We're watching YouTube videos and telling each other stories of the week. She has a way of perfectly hyperbolizing all of her anecdotes for me. Just far enough from the truth to make it hysterical. I tell her about the party we went to last weekend where everyone was on acid and a 40-year-old man, who charmingly went by the name of Uncle John, tried to give us a finger light show. She tells me about how one of her housemates confronted her with a proposition to hold a séance, claiming that he had already attempted to bring a demon into the house but, tragically, had failed. We validate the insanity of each other's peers and move on to other topics. The older we get, the more we realize we are different versions of the same person, that person being my mom.

* * * * *

Moments in the muddy echoes of my memory that radiate around the edges and seem to me like they are begging to be recognized.

Split Ends

BY COITO

I used to revel in the delicious curl of it,
the loving natural soft and tumbling down of it.
Mine.

I see the shadows nude in color, black in method,
they twirl and tangle and make a place in it.
Not mine.

I remember you easing gilded words into my scalp,
those baby's breath lips grazing it.
Yours.

Now the loving natural soft tumbles down
upon purple bursts invading the nude of my cheek,
speckled like stardust after supernovas collide and explode.
Yours.

Dance like No One is Watching

By GABRIELA RIEGOS



Querida Profe

BY KIMBERLEE TURNER

El vigor en tu paso
La pasión en tu voz
El desinterés de tus acciones
El resplandor de tu presencia
A pensar que ya no son
Me llena de tristeza
Pero todavía estás viva dentro de mí
Tu vida me inspira tener vida
Tu bondad me inspira ser buena
Querida Profe,
Gracias por este último regalo,
Y todo lo demás.

The vigor in your step
The passion in your voice
The selflessness of your actions
The radiance of your presence
To think that they are no more
Fills me with sadness
But you are still alive in me
Your life inspires me to have life
Your goodness inspires me to be good
Querida Profe,
Thank you for this last gift,
And everything else.



A tribute to Dr. Kate Regan

About the Contributors

AMANDA ADAMS is a freshman at the University of Portland. She feels that she is truly blessed to have attractive friends that she can take pictures of. (2, 20)

ASHLEY ASAHINA is a junior English major who tends to have incredibly lucid dreams that cause her to write about and constantly question the nature of reality. She is currently seeking world peace within a jar of crunchy cookie butter. (61)

AHMED BASHANDI is a photographer who believes that beauty can be found everywhere. We just have to appreciate what we see in order to find the beauty. (46)

ERIN BRESKA, a senior biology major, grew up in Northern California appreciating the outdoors. She enjoys creative non-fiction writing and in her free time can be found crafting homemade cards with her vintage typewriter. (26)

COITO does have a first name, and it's Sara, but she doesn't like it. What she does like is how perfect Gloria Anzaldua looked in high-waisted jeans, beet stains, reading aloud, music by Nina Simone, and jazz squares. But all you really need to know is that she dreams of being in a band called Nippin' Hard, in which she would play the tambourine. (3, 33, 65)

SAMUEL COLOSIMO is a first-year Engineering student at the University of Portland. He enjoys a good cup of coffee, specifically an Ethiopian roast or a Sumatra blend. (32)

NICHOLAS COOGAN is a self-taught photographer from Los Angeles, where street photography provided a huge influence in his work. He would like to thank you for taking the time to view his photography: "You are the universe experiencing yourself." (38)

DANA COPPERNOLL-HOUSTON is a senior Environmental Science major with too many hobbies and not enough time. When she is not writing music or prose, she can be found making a mess in the kitchen, yelling at her computer, or making quasi-accurate weather forecasts. (41)

MEG CROWLEY wants to teach young children, live in cities all over the world, and bake all the desserts the world ever saw. But there are times she just so desperately needs to write. (36)

AJ DAVIES is a senior Biology major who loves spending his free time exercising, practicing digital photography, playing guitar, raving, and disregarding digital communication. He is still on track to be one of the first contestants in the Olympics when winking becomes a sport. Next year, he will be attending the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Regis University in Denver, CO. He hopes to continue to pursue his creative outlets between constant studying, missing the Toolshed, and living the Colorado lifestyle. (19)

HOPE DORMAN is a junior English major who aspires to someday be paid to write, but her life's true quest is to pet as many cats as possible and find the perfect chocolate chip cookie recipe. (18)

PHILIP ELLEFSON is a 72-year-old man trapped in the body of a 22-year-old man. He enjoys language, folk music, landscapes, and hearty home cooking. (1, 39)

ANA FONSECA doesn't like writing small blurbs about herself. It's like on the first day of school when you're asked to say your name and an interesting fact about yourself—Ana never knows what to say. In middle school, her interesting fact was that she didn't like maple syrup. Upon reflection, that was a weird and, in fact, not at all interesting fact, and what's more, she actually likes maple syrup now, occasionally on waffles. (30)

KATE GARCIA is a sophomore English and Political Science double major. She most enjoys onion rings and time spent with her cat Nelson. (63)

ANDREA HERNANDEZ-GARIBAY is a young, up-and-coming Mexican photographer. She loves capturing the beauty of nature and pays special attention to the small details that often go unnoticed. (35)

HALLIE HOLLAND is living her lifelong dream of becoming a Super Senior. She like the mountains, the desert, and dessert. (57, 58)

JACK HULBERT is an aspiring landscape photographer based in Reno, Nevada. One of his life goals is to live with and photograph the lives of indigenous peoples on each continent. (60)

MATT KLEMSZ is a fresh air addict and explorer at heart. His photos capture the beauty and freedom of the outdoors in an attempt to urge everyone to find the adventure in themselves (14, 62)

MEGAN LESTER is so happy you could make it. Have a seat, it'll just be a moment. (15, 31)

CARLYE MEISBURGER
only talks about herself
through clever haikus (21)

CLARE MUNGER is a senior French Studies major and English and Education minor. She hopes to live and teach in France, and perhaps write poetry under the Eiffel Tower. (25)

AMANDA MUNRO would like to thank all the people, animals, trees, flowers and leaves that have put up with posing for her pictures, especially her sister Carolyn, who is the subject of the photo in this magazine. (7)

CAROLYN MUNRO was born in Sagamihara, Japan, and moved twelve times before finding herself at the University of Portland, which she calls home. Now she is currently pursuing

her dream of becoming an accomplished writer, and will receive her English degree in May. (45)

MARISSA QUINONES is a freshman this year at the University of Portland. In her spare time, she loves to write, paint, sing for UP's Chapel Choir, and watch scary movies with her room-mates. (52)

MEGAN RICHARDSON is a senior majoring in Economics. After three and a half years of graphs and statistics, she's glad for the long-awaited foray into writing before she joins the real world. (47)

GABRIELA RIEGOS is a self-proclaimed photographer from Sacramento and that is about it... (66)

KATELIN STANLEY is a scientist, writer, and student of the world. Life is her inspiration and her prize, and her greatest hope is to share that wonder with the ever-racing blur that is humanity. (13, 56)

SAMANTHA STEELE is a Global Business major bent on world domination and voted "Most Likely to Stay Weird" in high school. (22)

HALI THOMPSON has too much going on in her head; sometimes she writes it down. Her favorite game to play is the one where you people-watch and make up their dialogue or speculate about their lives. Her imaginings—or so she imagines—are usually more hilarious or more outlandish than the reality of the matter. She supposes it's an odd thing that just peering at the surface, one can come up with a thousand different stories in vain attempts to understand the murky depths of a stranger. (8)

ANNIE TURNER is a local Portland resident studying to become a nurse. Recently, her main focus has been printmaking and the themes of identity and self-representation. (cover)

KIMBERLEE TURNER loves education, language, and culture. She is extremely grateful for all of the support she has received from the University of Portland community as she pursues a career as a language teacher. (67)

LEAH WALTERS began her photography career young by secretly commandeering her mother's camera one afternoon. Since then, she has enjoyed making photography a hobby while honing her skills as a photographer technically and artistically, as well as exploring its application to her current major, English, and her first and foremost artistic love: film. (44)

SARAH WEAVER enjoys wine, chocolate, Brie, and excellent books. She prefers these consumed together. (54)

GUANGJU WEI is a tall guy, 6'3", from Beijing, China. He is pursuing his "American Dream" here. Lucky people can make friends with him and the most lucky one can marry him. (24)

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Our 2015 contributors, a group of artists who represent the vast number of skillful, unique students on the UP campus, for their beautiful and affecting work.

Submission Policy

Writers Magazine accepts submissions of original creative work by current students of the University of Portland. These works include but are not limited to short prose, poetry, short plays, black and white photography, visual arts, and cartoons.

All submissions are evaluated by the editorial board. Submissions are kept anonymous throughout the evaluation process.